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DE RUEHLM #0184 0521144

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7721

INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0744

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7732

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5916

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4263

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1852

RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4267

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3363

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8343

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5829

RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0541

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2625

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000184

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FIGHTING CONTINUES IN MANNAR DISTRICT;  
LTTE KILLS THREE SOLDIERS IN SOUTH

¶1. (U) On February 20 at 11:00 AM, three soldiers were shot and killed in Buttala, an area deep in Sri Lanka's south. The Defense Ministry blamed the attack on the LTTE and deployed additional troops to conduct a search operation. Following the attack, the Defense Ministry replaced the military commander in Hambantota district and gave the new commander control over police in the area.

¶2. (U) In northern Sri Lanka, there have been reports of heavy fighting and shelling this week in Mannar and Adampan, located 10 km inside LTTE-controlled territory. The Defense Ministry says government forces repelled an LTTE attempt to reclaim land lost near Parappakandal in Mannar and then launched a pre-dawn offensive toward Adampan. The military spokesman reports that 53 LTTE cadres and 2 Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers were killed between Monday and Wednesday. The LTTE claims to have killed 10 SLA soldiers.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The Hambantota Commander was likely replaced for his failure to eliminate the LTTE presence in the Yala area. The LTTE has conducted several attacks in this area over the past few weeks, including a claymore attack on February 4 that killed 4 soldiers. Casualty counts in this latest fighting in the north appear high, but are hard to verify.

BLAKE